

A MANLY ADDRESS.

The National Afro-American Council Issues a Pronunciamento Defining the Status and Duty of the Afro-American. The Civil Rights of the Black Man—Sensible and Timely Advice.

Members of the National Afro-American Council—Your committee to whom was referred the work of preparing the address to the country as an expression of the opinion of the National Afro-American Council begs leave to report the following for your consideration:

"In every democracy the ballot is regarded as the chief safeguard of the rights and immunities of the citizen. In every democracy reasonable restrictions upon the exercise of the elective franchise have been imposed upon the electorate in the best interest of the State: but in all such democracies such restrictions have been imposed without invidious distinction upon all the members of the citizenship.



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"It is universally regarded as a fact, incontestable, not only in this Republic, but in all republics, ancient and modern, that a voteless citizen is a man who had no rights that citizens who vote feel bound to respect. We feel that all of the inequality under the law which has grown out of conditions that have developed since the subversion of the reconstruction governments in 1876, hinges entirely upon the disproportionate influence which Afro-American citizens, through the indisposition or negligence of the national government, have exercised in the States of the Union where they preponderate numerically, or are a respectable minority.

"We feel it to be of supreme moment to protest against the nullification by fundamental enactment of the suffrage provisions of the Federal Constitution by the States of Mississippi, South Carolina, Louisiana and North Carolina, and against the accomplishment of the same purpose by the late slave-holding group of States by indirect, but methods equally as repugnant to constitutional provisions and sound morality.

"The equality of citizens of the Republic under the Federal Constitution is a principle of the government which affects all alike, and infraction of the rights of one inevitably involves infraction of the rights of the other. The tendency towards disfranchisement is not a race question, nor a sectional question, although for the present we are the principal victims of it; it is a national question, and affects all of the citizens of the United States, because where we are injured in our rights to-day others may be injured in theirs to-morrow. Indeed, if a fundamental guarantee of the right of life, liberty or property under the Constitution, in which we are vitally concerned, may be violated with impunity, there is no reason why the cognate rights of others may not at some stage of our politics be

violated with equal impunity. We regard it as an immoral and unprejudiced construction of the fourteenth amendment to covertly seek to rob a large number of the citizenship of this country by State nullification of the precious rights guaranteed to them by the fourteenth amendment. What we contend for is that the citizenship of the United States as prescribed by the supreme law should not be affected in any of its parts for whatever reason, by any co-ordinate member of the federal compact.

"We are not opposed to restriction of suffrage rights by any State, by property or educational test, which shall apply to all citizens alike; but we maintain the State constitutions of Mississippi, South Carolina, North Carolina and Louisiana, enacted by a minority of the citizens of these States without submission for ratification to the people confessing that the action would not receive the approval of the people, are immoral in their purpose, in contravention of positive guarantees of the Federal Constitution, and in direct violation of the reconstruction acts by which those States were re-admitted into the Union.

"The suffrage rights of the Afro-American people, assured by the valorous conduct of the 180,000 black soldiers who fought to preserve the Union of our States and to suppress slave power, is the priceless jewel that we enjoy as the result of that valor; and we are unalterably opposed to any restriction of it which does not apply to all citizens of the State alike.

"The interests of the white men of the South are as much involved in this suffrage question as are ours. Their interests are identical with ours; what benefits them must benefit us; what injures them must injure us. It should not be difficult for them to see that forcing this question into the prominence which has been true of late can not be injurious to their influence as well as to their own in the government. There is not a member of this Council who does not know that the white man of the South can be generous as well as magnanimous, and where our interests are so generally intertwined we have a just right, and we do not feel that we entertain it in vain, to ask them to make a larger exhibition of this generosity and magnanimity which we know by personal experience to form so large a part of their character.

"We feel to say to them that it is well to have the strength of a giant, but at the same time we ask them if it is wise to use such strength as a giant. Let the Afro-American people stand up finchingly by their suffrage rights. It is a life and death struggle. Looking at it from this point of view we should be unfaithful to the trust committed to us if we did not warn the race against the danger of supporting any man or party in the North or South who is opposed to the full and free exercise of the elective franchise, under the provisions of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution.

"We have faith to believe that revolutions never go backwards, and that the abiding sense of justice in the American people, North and South, will ultimately impel them to concede to us all that we contend for, and which is inherently ours, as it is theirs, and we believe that the God of our destiny will guide us to that good understanding which is the basis of national power and happiness."

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